

PATRIOTISM AND POETRY  
IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY  
BRITAIN

DUSTIN GRIFFIN



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## *Contents*

|  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| <i>List of illustrations</i>                                       | <i>page</i> viii |
| <i>Acknowledgments</i>   | ix               |
| <i>List of abbreviations</i>                                       | x                |
| Introduction   |                  |
| 1 The eighteenth-century debate about patriotism                   | 7                |
| 2 Patriotic odes and patriot-poets                                 | 34               |
| 3 James Thomson: “to mix the Patriot’s with<br>the Poet’s Flame”   | 74               |
| 4 Mark Akenside: “great citizen of Albion”                         | 98               |
| 5 William Collins: “Virtue’s Patriot Theme”                        | 119              |
| 6 Thomas Gray: “some great and singular service<br>to his country” | 149              |
| 7 John Dyer: “sedulous for the public weal”                        | 180              |
| 8 Oliver Goldsmith: “half a patriot”                               | 205              |
| 9 Christopher Smart and William Cowper:<br>“Christian patriots”    | 230              |
| 10 Ann Yearsley: “the female patriot”                              | 262              |
| Conclusion   | 292              |
| <i>Bibliography</i>  | 296              |
| <i>Index</i>   | 309              |

## *Illustrations*

|   |  |               |
|---|--|---------------|
| 1 | “God Save King George” (1760). By permission of the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York  | <i>page</i> 8 |
| 2 | “The Treacherous Patriot Unmask’d” (1742). By permission of the British Museum   | 20            |
| 3 | Title page to John Conybeare, <i>True Patriotism. A Sermon</i> (1749). By permission of the British Library  | 23            |
| 4 | Thomas Rowlandson, “Liberty and Fame introducing Female Patriotism to Britania,” frontispiece to <i>History of the Westminster Election</i> , 2nd. edn. (1785). By permission of the British Library | 28            |
| 5 | Thomas Rowlandson, “The Two Patriotic Duchess’s on their Canvass” (1784). By permission of the British Museum  | 29            |
| 6 | “Slavery” (1738). By permission of the British Museum  | 46            |
| 7 | “British Liberty,” frontispiece to Ann Yearsley, <i>The Rural Lyre</i> (1796). By permission of the British Library  | 286           |

## CHAPTER I

### *The eighteenth-century debate about patriotism*

It is remarkable and a little surprising to rediscover that not only minor eighteenth-century poets but many of the poets whom we regard as major figures quite explicitly put themselves forward in their poems as *patriots*, from Pope, who in an introductory fragment from his projected epic *Brutus* (1743) aspired to be “My Countrys Poet,” to Cowper, who in *The Task* (1785) exclaimed “England, with all thy faults, I love thee still – / My Country!” (II, lines 206–7), and asserted that the poet “serves his country; recompenses well / The state” (VI, lines 968–69.) Between Pope and Cowper, not just the small fry quoted by Dobrée but virtually every poet whose works we consider canonical made a similar claim. Thomson aspires to “mix the Patriot’s with the Poet’s Flame” (*The Seasons, Autumn*, line 22), and salutes his native land: “Britannia, hail! . . . island of bliss amid the subject sea” (*Summer*, lines 1581–85). “Transported by my Country’s Love,” he says, “I’ve aimed / To sing her praises in ambitious verse” (*Summer*, lines 671–73). Even John Gay begins one of his *Fables* with an address “To My Native Country.”

Hail happy land, whose fertile grounds  
The liquid fence of Neptune bounds;  
By bounteous nature set apart,  
The seat of industry and art.<sup>1</sup>

The “design” of *Ocean. An Ode* (1730), says Edward Young, is to promote “the glory of my country and my King.”<sup>2</sup> Akenside, in a poem written “On Leaving Holland,” addresses his homeland, “where liberty to all is known” (line 26). It is there that “freedom’s ample fabric” has

<sup>1</sup> Fable VIII in the second volume of his *Fables*, published posthumously in 1738 (*Poetry and Prose*, ed. Vinton Dearing, 2 vols. [Oxford: Clarendon, 1974], II, 406). The advertisement to the collection claims that the fables show Gay to have been “a man of a truly honest Heart, and a sincere Lover of his Country” (II, 380). Gay’s lines were included in a 1760 print celebrating the accession of George III (see figure 1).

<sup>2</sup> *Poetical Works*, 2 vols. (London, 1866), II, 153.



Figure 1. "God Save King George" (1760). Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. Peel Col. III, fol. 50, no. 174

long been “fix’d . . . / On Albion’s happy shore” (*The Pleasures of Imagination* [1744], II, lines 43–44). For Akenside, the poet has a public and patriotic role to play: “Not far beneath the hero’s feet / Nor from the legislator’s seat / Stands far remote the bard” (“To Townshend in the Country,” lines 19–21). Included in William Collins’s 1746 collection of *Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegorical Subjects* is a set of poems critics have long thought of as “patriotic odes.” In the century’s most famous Pindaric ode, Thomas Gray’s bard confronts an invading monarch, and in a prophetic and patriotic vision unveils the future triumphs of “Britannia’s issue.” As he muses on Roman ruins, “High ambitious thoughts” inflame John Dyer “greatly to serve my country” (*The Ruins of Rome*, lines 128–29). Charles Churchill, though self-consciously a satirist and an adversary to the ministry, exclaims: “be England what she will, / With all her faults, she is my country still” (“The Farewell,” lines 27–28).<sup>3</sup> Goldsmith, mentally traveling through Europe, longs to return and settle in his native land. Even Christopher Smart, though locked up in Bedlam, celebrated Britain’s military heroes, and declared with patriotic fervor that he himself was “the Reviver of *Adoration* amongst *English-Men*” (*Jubilate Agno*, B332).

Why should poets from Pope to Cowper have put themselves forward at key moments in their poems as *patriots*? The answer is not simply to be found by examining the circumstances of each poet’s life or career but in locating causal factors in their shared culture. Proceeding on the double assumption that poetry has its own internal history, and that it is written and read within a particular public world, one would expect to find that patriotic poets in eighteenth-century Britain were at once responding to the poets who came before them, and to the pressures exerted by the larger political world in which they moved. I will look first at that larger political world.

In the middle decades of the eighteenth century it would probably have been difficult for a poet *not* to have a sense that he—or she—was a patriotic “Briton,” or at least that he was expected to be one. To begin with, the nation was more or less continuously at war from the late seventeenth century until the Congress of Vienna in 1815. The distinctive names assigned to particular “wars”—the Nine Years’ War under

<sup>3</sup> Churchill’s admirers thought of him as a patriot-poet. See Percival Stockdale: “Thine is the Poet’s; thine the Patriot’s Crown” (*Churchill Defended, a Poem Addressed to the Minority* [London, 1765]).

William III (1689–97), the War of the Spanish Succession under Queen Anne (1702–13), the War of the Austrian Succession (1743–48), the Seven Years' War (1756–63), the American Revolutionary War (1776–83), the wars against Revolutionary France (1793–1802) and against Napoleon (1803–15) – obscure the fact that Britain's chief adversary in each of these wars was France. Britain and France had become rivals for European – and worldwide – hegemony.

It was not simply the presence of a threatening “other” across the Channel that aroused British national feeling. As Linda Colley has argued, patriotic self-consciousness can be traced to domestic causes as well. The 1707 Union of the parliaments of England and Scotland<sup>4</sup> brought into being the new nation of Great Britain, comprised in fact of three once distinct nations, England, Scotland, and Wales. Cultural differences between the English core and the Celtic periphery did not simply disappear after 1707. They persisted, and made it necessary, so Colley has shown, to invent a new national identity which could enable regional differences and loyalties to be submerged even if not forgotten. That new “Britishness,” she argues, was based on the twin pillars of Protestantism and “liberty,” squarely opposed to French papistry and absolutism.<sup>5</sup> If, as Benedict Anderson has written, a nation is not so much a geographical or demographic fact as it is an “imagined community,” there is all the more reason to assume that the work of imagining Great Britain would be carried on – explicitly or implicitly – in significant part by the country's poets.<sup>6</sup>

Other large-scale political factors contributed to a heightened national self-awareness. Over the course of the eighteenth century Britain was being increasingly transformed – in fact, and in imagination – from an agricultural country to a commercial country, from a nation of yeomen to a nation of shopkeepers, from a self-dependent island set in a silver sea to a world-trading empire. These transformations could not but provoke a reexamination of the nation's identity. What, for the patriotic Briton, is “my country”? Is it a green and pleasant rural land? Or is it a stoutly defended island? If I am one of the many Scots living in

<sup>4</sup> The crowns had been united in 1603. <sup>5</sup> *Britons*, 11–54.

<sup>6</sup> *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (rev. edn., London, 1991). Anderson's work has prompted a vigorous literature on nationalism and national identity. Despite a developing consensus that “nations” have no objective existence but are “imagined communities,” historians still debate whether Britain in the eighteenth century was commonly regarded as one nation – or as three or four.

London, is “my country” Scotland, or England, or Britain?<sup>7</sup> Is the heart and soul of the nation to be found in London, the bustling metropolis, or in the rural counties? Does my country include “the empire” across the seas? And who are my countrymen? Do they include the Scots? the Irish? the white Protestant colonists in America? the wealthy sunburned nabobs who return from India or the West Indies to buy up great estates? the dark-skinned natives of Africa and the Indies who speak their own tongues and worship their own gods but are now subjects of the British empire? The case of Tobias Smollett, a Scot who spent most of his career in London, suggests that there was no simple answer. In an early poem (“The Tears of Scotland” [1746]) “my country” refers to Scotland. He later went on to write the *History of England* (1757) and the pro-government pamphlet *The Briton* (1762–63).

Other political factors emerging about mid-century would have contributed to the rise of patriotic consciousness throughout the new nation. The Jacobite rebellion of 1745 obliged Britons to clarify their political attachments – to the House of Hanover, on the throne since 1714, or to the former ruling family, the Stuarts, whose champion had landed in Scotland and marched as far south as Derby, 125 miles from London. Was Charles Edward, as his followers claimed, the rightful heir to the throne, or was he simply the pawn of Catholic plotters in Rome and Paris? Was George II “our noble King, Great George our King” – as the new popular song hailed him during the ’45 – or was he just a German prince who spoke little English and pursued Hanover’s continental interests with British blood and gold? The self-division of civil war tested British loyalties, but the fears of a French invasion in the 1750s prompted most of George’s subjects to rally ’round the flag and throne, at least for the duration of the Jacobite threat.

In the previous discussion I have avoided the term “nationalism,” and have used the terms “patriotism” and “national feeling” interchangeably. Before going further it is probably best to clarify the meanings I assign to my master term, patriotism. Some students of political theory and international relations will perhaps object that patriotism and nationalism are distinguishable. The former is usually said to be the older term, referring to what is assumed to be a universal attachment to one’s country, its

<sup>7</sup> Thomson, author of a “Panegyric on Britain” in his forthcoming *Summer*, wrote to a fellow Scot in 1726 that “Britannia . . . includes our native Country, Scotland” (*Letters and Documents*, ed. A. D. McKillop [Lawrence, KS, 1958], 48).

soil, its cultural legacy, typically as embodied in its monarch. The latter is said to be the newer term (it does not appear in English dictionaries until the mid-nineteenth century), referring to “nationalist” movements for independence or nation-building in Germany, Italy, and elsewhere. For political scientists, it refers to an attachment to the nation-state, and is prompted by a sense of cultural and ethnic homogeneity, and by a conscious sense of difference from other (presumably adversarial) nations.<sup>8</sup>

But it is very difficult to maintain this distinction in Britain, where “nationalism” appears to have arisen by the eighteenth century, probably because of the century-long confrontation with France, against whom Britons defined themselves.<sup>9</sup> For my purposes, nationalism will refer primarily to the relation between Britain and its foreign enemies or rivals and to Britain’s domination of global trade. Patriotism, my particular subject, focuses on the patriot’s attachment to his or her country, and on the service the patriot hopes to provide.

For all its loyalty and devotion, patriotism was not simply a celebrative mode. It often involved anxiety and ambivalence about the state of the nation and its prospects. One loved one’s country and feared for it, or one loved the country it once was and had perhaps ceased to be. We look back now on Britain across the whole length of the eighteenth century and see widening prosperity, political stability (especially in contrast to France), and a steady expansion of British power and empire. But for Britons of the day, the path to glory was punctuated by a series of shocks. To be sure, the “Bloodless Revolution” of 1688 and the Act of Settlement of 1701 established a firm political foundation. Marlborough’s victories and the successful conclusion of peace in 1713 demonstrated that British military power was more than equal to the French challenge, and significantly expanded the empire. But the brief Jacobite rising of 1715 brought another reminder that Britain’s own dynastic quarrel had not been resolved. For the next thirty years the Jacobite threat was sharp enough

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Leonard Doob, *Patriotism and Nationalism* (New Haven, 1964). But recent commentators, including Anderson, acknowledge that nationalism is very difficult to define. See also Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, 1990). Literary scholars tend to use the term nationalism more loosely. Lawrence Lipking, in “The Genius of the Shore: Lycidas, Adamastor, and the Poetics of Nationalism” (*PMLA*, 111 [1996], 205–21) refers to the “nationalism of Renaissance poets” (220n).

<sup>9</sup> See Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History, 1740–1830* (New York, 1987). Colley (*Britons*), drawing on Newman, makes no effective distinction between patriotism, a sense of “national identity,” and nationalism. Kathleen Wilson (*The Sense of the People*) tries to maintain the distinction, finding both present in eighteenth-century Britain. Liah Greenfeld (*Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* [Cambridge, MA, 1992]) finds nationalism in England by the mid-seventeenth century (27–87). John Cannon includes a chapter on “Johnson and Nationalism” in his *Samuel Johnson and the Politics of Hanoverian England* (Oxford, 1994).

to provoke parliamentary investigations of the Tories, who made a suspiciously generous peace with France, and the famous treason trial of Bishop Atterbury in 1723. In 1745 the landing of Charles Edward Stuart demonstrated that worries about the Jacobites were not fanciful, and although the rebellion was easily put down within eight months of the first battle, early Jacobite successes led many to wonder about the wisdom of British commanders and the valor of common British soldiers, and to fear that the Hanoverian monarchy would be overthrown.

By the same token, early French victories in the Seven Years' War seemed to confirm the dire analysis of British political, military, and cultural degeneration in John Brown's widely read *Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* (1757). Brown saw in the "present State and Situation of the Country" a "*Crisis*" both "important and alarming" ("Advertisement"). "We are rolling to the Brink of a Precipice that must destroy us," not simply because of the external French threat but because of internal weakness, "*vain, luxurious, and selfish* EFFEMINACY."<sup>10</sup> He was not alone. The Scottish bard of *The Patriot, or A Call to Glory* (1757) sounded a Brownian alarm, warning Britons that they were

Immers'd in shameful lethargy and sloth,  
In fatal pleasures and fantastic schemes,  
Delusive prospects, and ignoble care,  
Destructive of her native dignity. (5)

As military historians have confirmed, there were limits to English willingness to make sacrifices for their country. Even in wartime, one-third to a half of all naval seamen had to be impressed. Desertion rates were very high, not just in the face of battle but from units stationed at home – 7 percent per year in the Seven Years' War, 13 percent per year in the American War. As late as 1808, one-third of draft-eligible men avoided overseas service.<sup>11</sup>

Even when the tide of battle turned in 1759 to favor the British, Brown's warnings were not forgotten.<sup>12</sup> Commentators such as Johnson and Goldsmith plainly questioned the wisdom of a war to gain territory

<sup>10</sup> *Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* (London, 1757), I, 15, 27. Compare Smollett's *Complete History of England* (1757–58), which also claimed that England was in crisis: "Her debts are enormous; her taxes intolerable, her people discontented, and the sinnes [i.e., the sinews] of her government relaxed . . . She is even deserted by her wonted vigour, steadiness, and intrepidity: She grows vain, fantastical, and pusillanimous" (8 vols., 1791, III, 191–92).

<sup>11</sup> *An Imperial State at War: Britain from 1689 to 1815*, ed. Lawrence Stone (London, 1994), 13–14; N. A. M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (Annapolis, 1986), 203.

<sup>12</sup> In some eyes Brown was discredited by British victories, but for many readers in succeeding decades – Cowper among them – his analysis was still sound.

(in Canada, for example), that at best would drain the resources of the nation and at worst would prove hostile and barren. In a *Citizen of the World* essay published in April 1760, Goldsmith's Lien Chi Altangi observes that "extending empire is often diminishing power . . . that colonies by draining away the brave and enterprising, leave the country in the hands of the timid and the avaricious, . . . that there is a wide difference between a conquering and a flourishing empire."<sup>13</sup>

The Peace of Paris in 1763 brought the Seven Years' War to a triumphant close, but military victory could be as troubling as defeat. British wars in the century always led to a sharp increase in the national debt. As Colley has suggested, Britons also had to adjust to the new idea that Britain was now a global empire, ranging from Bombay in the east to Hudson's Bay in the west. It had gained not only new territory but new people who spoke other tongues and observed other customs. Would the values and traditions of the home island be preserved in the new commercial-military empire? Horace Walpole in 1773 querulously asked: "What is England now? – A sink of Indian wealth, filled by nabobs, and emptied by Maccaronies! – A senate sold and despised! . . . A gaming, robbing, wrangling, railing nation, without principles, genius, character, or allies; the overgrown shadow of what it was."<sup>14</sup> Junius in 1769 lamented "a nation overwhelmed with debt; her revenues wasted; her trade declining; the affections of her colonies alienated; the duty of the magistrate transferred to the soldiery; . . . the whole administration of justice become odious and suspected to the whole body of the people."<sup>15</sup>

Despite the arguments of Colley and others who have emphasized the growth of loyal attachment to the crown, especially after the accession of George III in 1760, evidence of political unrest and disaffection abounds, from the anti-administration Wilkesite riots in the 1760s to the anti-Catholic Gordon riots in 1780. Burke's famous *Thoughts on the Causes of the Present Discontents* (1770) suggests that a sense of crisis had invaded parliament itself:

That government is at once dreaded and contemned; that the laws are despoiled of all their respected and salutary terrors; that their inaction is a subject of ridicule, and their exertion of abhorrence; that rank, and office and title, and

<sup>13</sup> *Citizen of the World*, Letter xxvi, in *Collected Works*, ed. Arthur Friedman, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), II, 108. One of the chief arguments for peace in 1763 was that by continuing the war (and retaining all captured territory) Britain ran the danger of "draining and exhausting our mother-country" (*Patriotism! A Farce* [1763], 3).

<sup>14</sup> *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. Wilmarth S. Lewis, 48 vols. in 49 (New Haven, 1937–83), xxiii, 498.

<sup>15</sup> Letter of 21 January 1769, in *Letters of Junius*, ed. John Cannon (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 33.

all the solemn plausibilities of the world, have lost their reverence and effect; that our foreign politics are as much deranged as our domestic economy; that our dependencies are slackened in their affection, and loosened from their obedience; that we know neither how to yield nor how to enforce; that hardly anything above or below, abroad or at home, is sound and entire; but that disconnection and confusion, in office, in parties, in families, in Parliament, in the nation, prevail beyond the disorders of any former time; these are facts universally admitted and lamented.<sup>16</sup>

In the decade to follow, Burke played a central role in the divisive national debate about how to respond to the developing crisis in the American colonies. His famous motion for *Conciliation with the Colonies* (1775), although defeated, was a clear sign that many Britons did not support the war to put down the rebellious colonists. The war was to draw in the French, and Britain's resounding defeat—the only war in the century that Britain clearly lost—led, not surprisingly, to profound soul-searching: what national weakness had led to humiliating failure? Johnson's letters after the 1783 Peace of Paris show he was deeply disturbed:

I cannot but suffer some pain when I compare the state of this kingdom, with that in which we triumphed twenty years ago . . . To any man who extends his thoughts to national considerations, the times are dismal and gloomy . . . we have all the world for our enemies . . . the King and Parliament have lost even the titular dominion of America, and the real power of government every where else. Thus Empires are broken down when the profits of administration are so great, that ambition is satisfied with obtaining them.<sup>17</sup>

Cowper's *The Task* (1785) is among other things a troubled probing, on the part of a man who declares his deep love of his country, of the causes of what he saw as a grievous "loss of Empire" (v, line 457).

At century's end the Reverend Richard Price, in an ardent *Discourse on the Love of our Country* (1789), could nonetheless conclude his patriotic sermon with a troubled survey of "the state of this country."

It is too evident that the state of this country is such as renders it an object of concern and anxiety. It wants (I have shewn you) the grand security of public liberty. Increasing luxury has multiplied abuses in it. A monstrous weight of debt is crippling it. Vice and venality are bringing down upon it God's displeasure. That spirit to which it owes its distinction is declining, and some late events seem

<sup>16</sup> *Thoughts on the Causes of the Present Discontents* (1770), in *Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, gen. ed. Paul Langford, 8 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980–), II, 253.

<sup>17</sup> *Letters*, ed. Bruce Redford (Princeton, 1992–94), IV, 62–63, 267, 277.

to prove that it is becoming every day more reconcileable to encroachments on the securities of its liberties.<sup>18</sup>

Worries about the “condition of Britain” prompted one writer after another to declare his own patriotic devotion. It is not surprising that poets too felt called upon to examine themselves and to stand up to be counted.

#### THE DISCOURSE OF PATRIOTISM

It was not only political circumstances that prompted national feeling: patriotism became the subject of intense textual discussion. Beginning in the 1730s and extending over the rest of the century, there developed what might be called a discourse of patriotism, in which participants – both the writers who supported the political Opposition and those who supported the successive ministries – laid claim to the title of “patriot” and debated the nature of true patriotism.

During the last decade of Walpole’s rule, a number of his opponents, mostly disaffected Whigs, gathered under the banner of “Patriotism,” and sustained a critique of Walpolean government-by-corruption in the name of traditional English “liberties.” As Christine Gerrard has noted, they had roots in neo-Harringtonian “Country party” ideology, arguing for the crucial role of the Commons in maintaining the balance of government, and resisting what they saw as extensions of executive influence through the awarding of places and pensions. In foreign policy they tended to be nationalistic, invoking the glorious memory of English military might, when Edward III and Henry V defeated the French at Crécy and Agincourt, or when Elizabeth destroyed the invading Armada of Spain. But they were reluctant to engage British forces in continental wars (largely in the pursuit of the King’s Hanoverian interests), preferring a blue-water policy, and championing what they saw as a genuine British interest in maritime commerce. The most prominent of the “Patriot” leaders, Bolingbroke and William Pulteney, were joined by the Earl of Chesterfield, Richard Temple Viscount Cobham, George Lyttelton, William Pitt, and others.<sup>19</sup> The theoretical underpinnings of the “Patriot”

<sup>18</sup> *Political Writings*, ed. D. O. Thomas (Cambridge, 1991), 194.

<sup>19</sup> Historians continue to disagree about the political landscape of the 1730s – whether the “Tories” survived as a party, whether there was a distinct “Country” party, whether the “Patriots” formed a distinct group, whether there were clear distinctions between “Patriots” and Jacobites. For details, see Gerrard, *Patriot Opposition*, the best account of the literary “Patriots.” What matters for my purposes is that “Patriot” rhetoric was now part of the national political debate.

position were laid down beginning about 1731, first in the Opposition journal, *The Craftsman*, largely the work of Pulteney and Bolingbroke, and later in Bolingbroke's *The Idea of a Patriot King*, written in 1738 and widely circulated among the "Patriot" group, though not published until 1749 as *Letters on the Spirit of Patriotism: on the Idea of a Patriot King; and on the State of Parties, At the Accession of George I.* Bolingbroke's "Patriot King" is a limited monarch who preserves the constitution and the spirit of liberty, who espouses "no party," but rather governs "like the common father of his people," wins their affection, and reconciles them to each other. He governs by "a national concurrence instead of governing by the management of parties and factions in the state." He is animated by "real patriotism" in contrast to the "private ambition" that motivates the unnamed Walpole, then (in 1738) the still successful manager of the state. Bolingbroke's *Idea* concludes with the "whole glorious scene of a patriot reign":

concord will appear, brooding peace and prosperity on the happy land; joy sitting in every face, content in every heart; a people unoppressed, undisturbed, unalarmed; busy to improve their private property and the public stock; fleets covering the ocean, bringing home wealth by the returns of industry, carrying assistance or terror abroad by the direction of wisdom, and asserting triumphantly the right and the honor of Great Britain, as far as waters roll and as winds can waft them.<sup>20</sup>

This is a vision of Britain, an "imagined community," to match the panegyrics on the new nation found in the most ardently patriotic poems of the century. And the "Patriots" attracted a number of the younger writers of the 1730s, excited by the political rhetoric. They included such major figures as James Thomson, Alexander Pope, Samuel Johnson, and Henry Fielding, and such lesser lights (remembered now primarily by scholars) as Richard Glover, David Mallet, and Henry Brooke.<sup>21</sup> As Johnson put it, in characterizing Brooke's political tragedy, *Gustavus Vasa* (1738), their works seemed "designed to kindle in the audience a flame of

<sup>20</sup> *The Idea of a Patriot King*, in Bolingbroke's *Political Writings: The Conservative Enlightenment*, ed. Bernard Cottret (New York, 1997), 419.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph Warton, who in 1797 thought of these "Patriot" writers as animated by a "great Spirit of liberty," included the names of Robert Nugent (his *Ode to Mankind* and *To Mr. Pulteney*) and William King (his *Miltonis Epistola* and *Templum Libertatis*). See Warton's *Works of Pope*, 9 vols. (London, 1797), IV, 309n. Christine Gerrard adds James Hammond, William Somerville, Richard Powney, George Lillo, and (especially) Gilbert West and Aaron Hill (*Patriot Opposition*, 63–66, 76–81, 224–29).

opposition, patriotism, publick spirit, and independency.”<sup>22</sup> Burke later declared that Walpole, who preferred a pacifist policy, was forced into war “by the most leading politicians, by the first orators, and the greatest poets of the time.”<sup>23</sup>

Bolingbroke’s vision was an attractive one, so attractive that any politician could endorse it, whether in Opposition or in the ministry. From the beginning, indeed, the ministry deployed a similar vision and the same discourse of patriotism, with invocations of England’s “ancient constitution,” of “Gothic” or “Saxon” (i.e., pre-Norman) “liberties,” of Crécy and Agincourt, of Elizabeth (beloved queen, champion of Protestantism, who defeated Spain abroad and sedition at home), and of “Revolution principles,” commerce, and the British navy. From the beginning of the “Patriot” campaign, the ministry responded by demonizing their adversaries as faction-mongers and casting themselves as the true patriots.

One attack on Bolingbroke, *The Patriot at Full Length; or, an Inscription for an Obelisk* (1735), regards him as “An Enemy to his King, To his Country, and to all Good Men.” Recalling Bolingbroke’s flirtation with the Jacobites in 1715, the anonymous polemicist goes so far as to declare that “the Professions of the Patriot were always urged, / To disguise the schemes of the Traytor” (2). It was a commonplace to insist that self-proclaimed patriots were hypocrites.<sup>24</sup> William Arnall, one of the ministry’s most prolific apologists, warned that “private Passion often calls itself publick Spirit; and . . . very selfish and very foolish Men call themselves Patriots.” In the no-nonsense words of his title, “Opposition” was “No Proof of [true] Patriotism.” “True Patriotism” – by which he meant that exemplified by the “Men in Power” – is divested of all “Passion and of Party-Spirit.”<sup>25</sup> Walpole himself was praised by obliging poets as the nation’s “most Illustrious *Patriot*.”<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> From Johnson’s *Compleat Vindication of the Licensers of the Stage* (1739, in *Political Writings*, 64), where Johnson, adopting the voice of a government licenser, pretends to condemn Brooke’s play.

<sup>23</sup> The first “Letter on a Regicide Peace,” in *Writings and Speeches*, ix, 226.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. the attack on the “*seeming Patriot*” in another contemporary satire: “our worst of Foes! / Who makes, and mourns, at once, his Country’s Woes” (*Modern Patriotism. A Poem* [1734], 2).

<sup>25</sup> *Opposition. No Proof of Patriotism; with Some Observations and Advice Concerning Party-Writings* (London, 1735), 31. Cf. John Lord Hervey’s *The Conduct of the Opposition, and the Tendency of Modern Patriotism* (Edinburgh, 1734), warning that steps taken by the Opposition tend not toward the “Maintenance of Liberty” but its “Destruction” (5). Other attacks include *Sedition and Defamation Display’d* (London, 1731) and *A Coalition of Patriots Delineated* (London, 1735).

<sup>26</sup> Thomson, dedication [to Walpole] of the “Poem Sacred to the Memory of Sir Isaac Newton” (1727). Compare Joseph Mitchell’s “The Patriot” (*Poems on Several Occasions*, 2 vols. [London, 1729], II, 322–23), and verses that appeared in the *Daily Gazetteer* for 24 April 1738: “This is the Sovereign Man Compleat; / Hero; Patriot; glorious; free; / Rich, and wise; and fair, and great; / Generous

After the fall of Walpole in 1742, Pulteney's unwillingness to form a new government, his apparent abandonment of the Patriot cause, and his acceptance of a peerage as the Earl of Bath seemed only to confirm the old charge – heard at least since Dryden's days<sup>27</sup> – that "Patriots" were motivated not by principle but by self-seeking.<sup>28</sup> A contemporary print reveals "The Treacherous Patriot Unmask'd" (see figure 2). But the term possessed such political attractions that it was reclaimed by the ministry. The supporters of Henry Pelham, Prime Minister in the mid-1740s, declared that there was indeed no inconsistency between patriotism and office, that one might be a patriot "in *Place* and *Power*."<sup>29</sup> Sir Hanbury Williams, who never tired of mocking "Patriots" such as Pulteney, could still hail the Duke of Cumberland as a "patriot" who fought on behalf of "liberty oppress."<sup>30</sup> At the height of the Jacobite rebellion in 1745–46 Fielding, who in *The Champion* (1739–41) had previously written in support of Opposition "Patriots," founded a new journal, *The True Patriot*, to distinguish between "modern" or "false" patriotism and the real thing. The false patriot – and Fielding has in mind the political Opposition – uses love of country as a cloak for "Ambition, Avarice, Revenge, Envy, Malice, every bad Passion in the Mind of Man" (no. 2).<sup>31</sup> He is in fact an "Incendiary," who seeks only to "blow up and inflame . . . Party-Divisions." (Note that it is now the Opposition rather than the ministry which tries to arouse factional or party distinctions.) By contrast, true patriotism is "Love of one's Country carried into Action" (117). The true patriot "will use his most ardent Endeavours . . . to extinguish a Rebellion which so greatly threatens the Destruction of . . . the present Royal Family [and] . . . THE VERY BEING OF THIS NATION" (120).

Fielding's rhetorical tactic proved to be popular with ministerial writers in succeeding decades. Pitt in the 1750s was hailed as the "Patriot

WALPOLE, Thou art He." For brief discussion, see Tone Urstall, *Sir Robert Walpole's Poets: The Use of Literature as Pro-Government Propaganda, 1721–1742* (Newark, DE, 1999), 197–99.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. his sneer at Achiophel (Shaftesbury) who "Usurp'd a Patriot's all-attoning Name" (*Absalom and Achitophel*, line 179).

<sup>28</sup> See for example *The Patriot and the Minister Reviewed: by Way of Dialogue* (London, 1743), apparently written from the point of view not of the ministry but of a disappointed Patriot. The memory of Pulteney's "apostasy" remained vivid enough to be invoked in attacks on patriots twenty-five years later. See *An Essay on Patriotism, in the Style and Manner of Mr. Pope's Essay on Man* (n.p., 1766) and the prose *Essay on Patriotism* (London, 1768).

<sup>29</sup> See *Power and Patriotism: A Poetical Epistle Humbly Inscribed to the Right Honourable H. P. Esq.* (London, 1746): "true Patriots may be able Politicians, and . . . our Politicians are actually Patriots, not in Name but in Fact" (7).

<sup>30</sup> *Works*, 3 vols. (London, 1822), 1, 104. See also his "The Patriot Parrot: A Fable" (I, 214–15), "A New Ode" [on Pulteney's apostasy] (II, 156), and a mock epitaph (I, 171).

<sup>31</sup> *The True Patriot and Related Writings*, ed. W. B. Coley (Middletown, 1987), 116.



Figure 2. "The Treacherous Patriot Unmask'd" (1742). BM Cat 2538

Minister." Upon his accession to the throne in 1760, George III, grandson of George II, proclaimed that (unlike his grandfather) he was born and bred a Briton, and he offered himself to his subjects as a "Patriot King." In the opening number of a new government-financed periodical entitled *The Briton*, the editor Tobias Smollett promised to "pluck the mask of

patriotism from the front of faction,” and proceeded to honor the “true patriotism” of Bute, the new patriot-minister (no. 5).<sup>32</sup>

Despite ministerial efforts to monopolize the term, the meaning of “patriot” continued to be contested. *Ministerial Patriotism Detected* (1763) sought to refute Bute’s claim to patriotism.<sup>33</sup> A “Patriot” opposition persisted throughout the century, always laboring under the suspicion that it was actuated not by love of country but by discontent or avarice. Wilkes raised a “Patriot” banner in the 1760s, and it was Wilkesite patriotism that Johnson had in mind both in his famous definition of “patriot” in the 1773 revision of the *Dictionary* (“a factious disturber of the government”) and in his political pamphlet, *The Patriot* (1774).<sup>34</sup> Political writers continued to bandy the slogans of “true” and “false” patriot. The author of an *Essay on Patriotism* in 1768, for example, offers satiric observations on “the Character and Conduct of some late famous Pretenders to that Virtue, Particularly of the present Popular Gentleman.” The “Popular Gentleman” is Wilkes, ridiculed as an “impostor” who has fooled a gullible public with his patriotic rhetoric:

he has only to set up for what is called a Patriot, to write, and to scribble, and to bawl out for Liberty and Independence, and all his profligacy and flagitiousness will be looked over and forgotten, nay, even reckoned a virtue. (3)<sup>35</sup>

Another “impostor” in patriotism is Pitt, who resigned his ministerial office in 1761 (and accepted a peerage as Earl of Chatham) when

<sup>32</sup> *Poems, Plays, and “The Briton,”* intro. Byron Gassman, ed. O. M. Brack, Jr. (Athens, GA, 1993), 241, 266.

<sup>33</sup> “If the minister really had had the good of the nation at heart, . . . what a fine field we find here [peace negotiations in 1762], to display his patriotism” [the author thinks Bute concluded a “disadvantageous peace”]. The real “worthy patriots” of the day, he goes on, are Lord Temple, Pitt, and Wilkes, “men of honest views” (*Ministerial Patriotism Detected; Or the Present Opposition Proved to be founded on Truly, just and laudable Principles* [London, 1763], 11, 25, 33).

<sup>34</sup> Johnson’s essay is one of the most sustained comparisons of “true” and “false” patriotism in the period. Although suspicious of self-professed Patriots, Johnson assigned great value to patriotism, as in his meditation on the power of place to prompt emotion: “That man is little to be envied, whose patriotism would not gain force upon the plains of Marathon, or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona” (*Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland*, ed. Mary Lascelles [New Haven, 1971], 148).

<sup>35</sup> In other attacks, Wilkes’ vaunted “Liberty” is a cover for faction and even rebellion. Like Bolingbroke and Pulteney before him, he is accused of political ambition. It is clear from Wilkes’ example, says the Pope-inspired satirist:

That pow’r and place are Oppositions aim,  
That Patriotism and Int’rest are the same.

(Richard Bentley, *Patriotism, a Mock-Heroic* [2nd. edn., London, 1765]). As another Popean polemicist put it, in pretending to offer instruction in patriotism, “First muse unfold, one universal Thing, / To love your Country, you must hate your King” (*The Patriots Guide. A Poem Inscribed to the Earl of C—M, Junius, and John Wilkes* [London, 1773], 3).

he was unable to secure support for war against Spain. Hostile critics and former friends alike compared the “apostasy” of Pulteney some twenty years earlier.<sup>36</sup> One writer suspects that the “Patriot Minister” was still scheming for a return to power. In *Patriotism! A Farce* (1764) Pitt appears as “Slyboots” to explain his strategy to a political supporter: “My resignation was a master-stroke of policy: and if my schemes do not miscarry, you shall soon see me at the helm again, with more absolute authority than ever” (1). The war was popular, but the country needed peace – this is the writer’s view – and Slyboots “knew it would be next to impossible for any minister to conclude a peace, without bringing upon himself an immense load of popular odium, which therefore I resolved to avoid” (2).

Given the acrimonious controversy from the 1730s into the 1780s, both in the public press and in lampoons, about “patriotism”,<sup>37</sup> it is perhaps surprising that a mid-century poet would risk identifying himself as a “patriot.” As the oft-cited examples of Pulteney and Pitt seemed to show, even the patriot had his price. But patriotism was not in fact thoroughly discredited, and writers sought to reclaim the term. John Conybeare, Bishop of Bristol, preached a sermon on *True Patriotism* (published 1749) before the House of Commons on a day of Thanksgiving at the end of the War of the Austrian Succession (see figure 3). His text was Psalm 122, a prayer for peace and prosperity in Jerusalem, in which the psalmist concludes by addressing his country: “I will seek thy good.” Not surprisingly (given the audience), Conybeare avoids polemic and, while defending both the peace and the King, appeals for all sides to show “real Patriotism, . . . the just and reasonable Love of our Country.” Although Conybeare avoids awkward topics such as what it might mean for a Frenchman to love *his* country, he implicitly invokes the Christian idea of the “common body” of the church, but gives it a distinctively Erastian and even secular sense, imagining the “country” to be the “Great Society we belong to; in which the several Members are united together by common Laws under One Common Head” (28).<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> *An Essay on Patriotism, in the Style and Manner of Mr. Pope’s Essay on Man*, esp. 16–17, and the prose *Essay on Patriotism*.

<sup>37</sup> *Liberty and Patriotism: A Miscellaneous Ode* (London, 1778), mocks a new generation of pro-American “patriots,” William Beckford, the Reverend John Horne (later known as John Horne Tooke), and Catharine Macaulay (along with Wilkes).

<sup>38</sup> Compare the popular ballad of the same year, appealing for “Patriots” to stop quarreling with each other, *A Ballad. To the Tune of Chevy Chase* (London, 1749): “God Save the King, and bless the Land, / In Plenty, Joy, and Peace; / And grant, henceforth, that foul Debates / Twixt Patriots may cease” (6). The “debates” may be those between Dodington and James Ralph, both members of the “Patriot” group.

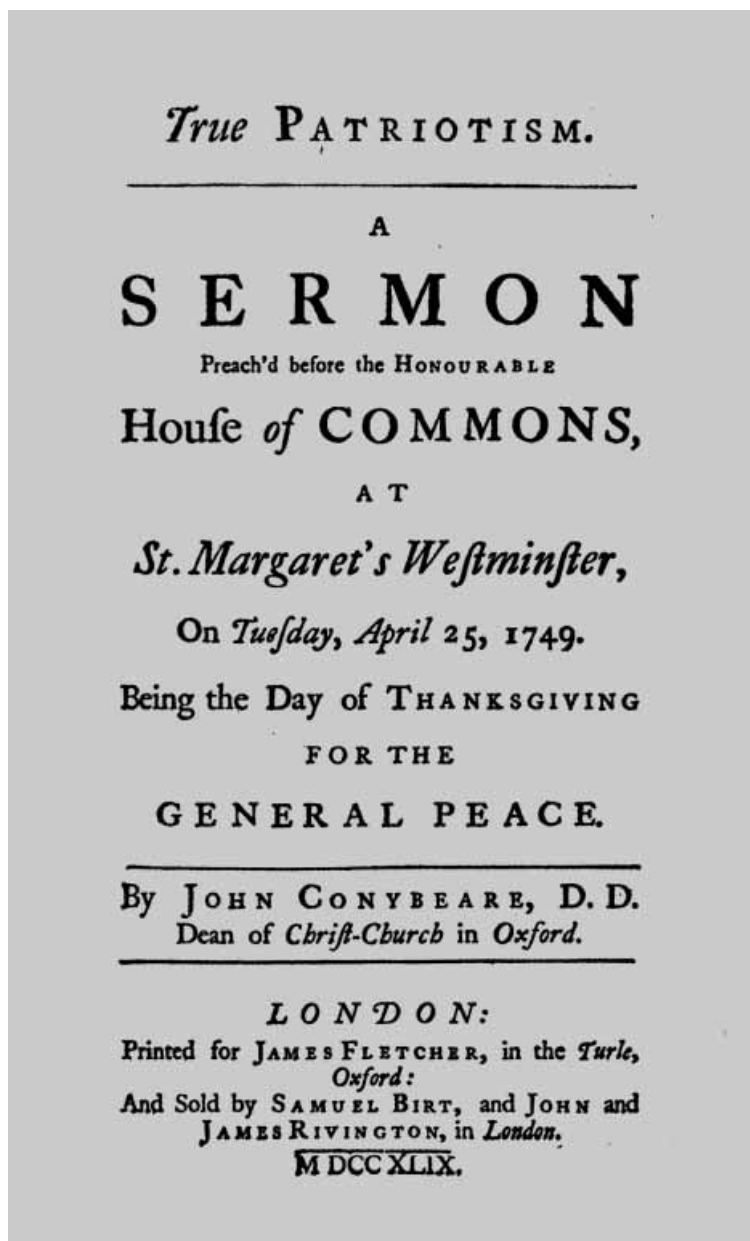


Figure 3. Title page to *True Patriotism. A Sermon* (1749). BL shelfmark 695.g.5.(6)

The controversy about patriotism also drew in less polemical writers who discoursed at essayistic length, seeking to distinguish between “true” and “false” patriotism and between a higher and a lower form. An essay “On the Love of our Country” in *The Museum* in July 1746, for example, finds that because “our Country” includes “almost all our moral Relations,” the “Duty which we owe the Public” is almost the highest of our moral duties (282).<sup>39</sup> But in fact we have two higher obligations, to “the whole human species” and to “the Author of our Being.” Thus if our country uses “unjust, treacherous, or dishonourable Methods” or pursues a vicious end, e.g., if it aims at “universal Empire” (284), then love of our country would be “a criminal Affection.” The essayist perhaps has in mind the idea that just as British writers were celebrating the defeat of the Jacobites at Culloden, the French (in pursuit, so the British claimed, of “universal monarchy”) were patriotically celebrating their military success at Fontenoy and elsewhere on the continent. His praise of English patriotism is discreetly qualified:

I should rejoice to find that our Love of *Old England* partook of no inhospitable Pride, of no *Gothic* Superstition, of no *French* or *Turkish* Servility. An *Englishman* should be ashamed if, by the *Love of his Country*, he be found to mean anything less than a calm, resolute Desire that the People of *England* may for ever be free, virtuous, and orderly among themselves, and for ever watchful, valiant, and glorious in protecting their Neighbours and the whole civiliz'd World, against the Encroachments of Universal Monarchy. (286–87)

What implicitly worries the essayist is that patriotism can slide into what we would call aggressive and expansionist nationalism.

*The Analysis of Patriotism* (1768) goes beyond exposing the imposture of Opposition “patriotism” to argue that “the Nature of Patriotism” varies as the “temporary Circumstances [of government] change.” Sometimes “the Duties of a Patriot call for Opposition to the Measures of Government,” but on other occasions a “hearty Concurrence” with the ministry is “as much Patriotic Duty” (viii–ix). The “principal Concern” of the true Roman patriot was “to benefit his Country” (17). In modern Britain both ministers and Opposition “patriots” seek only “the Disposal of the valuable Employments” of office (24). The specific occasion of the essay is the parliamentary debate about the appropriate response to the American

<sup>39</sup> The writer adopts the Ciceronian idea that love of country includes all other attachments: “Cari sunt parentes, cari liberi propinqui familiares; sed omnes omnium caritates patria complexa est” (*De Officiis*, 1, 57, “Parents are dear, and children, relatives and acquaintances are dear, but our country has on its own embraced all the affections of all of us,” tr. M. T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins, in *On Duties* [Cambridge, 1991], 23).

“patriots” in Boston, and to their friends in England, who pretend loyalty to the crown and “esteem for the common good” (37), but who are in fact guilty of “factious Bickerings” (44). The essay calls on patriotic Englishmen to close ranks in support of the ministry and to take a hard line against the “black Ingratitude” of the American colonists.

By contrast, the Reverend Charles Christian Newman’s poem, *The Love of our Country* (1783), insists that supporters of American independence are true British patriots. Written in the aftermath of military defeat in America at a time when many were bemoaning the loss of the colonies, Newman’s poem, dedicated to the fifth Duke of Devonshire, takes its epigraph from the locus classicus on “love of country” from Cicero’s *De Officiis*. By distinguishing between a “vulgar” patriotism based on “an attachment to the soil” and a “proper” patriotism founded “upon a principle of reason, duty, and affection” (vi), Newman in effect dismisses the idea that one’s “country” consists of so many acres of ground, and that Britain has lost some integral part of itself. He reassures Britons that they still enjoy “with independence and security” the “blessings” of “Relations, family, connections, friends and property.” He goes on to honor three kinds of patriotic hero: soldiers who “offer up their consecrated blood, / The willing victims for their country’s good”;<sup>40</sup> those public-spirited men who quit their “Ease, pleasure, fortune for the public weal”; and writers, those “talents of the mind” (like himself) who serve “the public end” by teaching morals, passing “sentence” on virtues and crimes, and warning of “rights invaded” or reminding Britons of their freedoms:

... on the public mind a sense to press  
Of blessings which the free alone possess.  
(20)

As we shall see, identifying a patriotic service for the poet to perform is of acute concern not just to the Reverend Newman, but to most of the better-known poets of his century as well.

Just as the American Revolution prompted many writers to reconsider the nature of “true” patriotism, so too did the increasing presence of women in the nation’s cultural and political life. Was it appropriate for women to offer themselves as “patriots” or for women writers to take up public and political topics? When Catharine Macaulay did so, she was greeted – in some quarters – with censure and ridicule. Her *History*

<sup>40</sup> Although Newman approves of American independence, he perhaps finds it politically tactful to praise British soldiers who did their duty. Indeed, he makes a special appeal (17–19) that the state ought to compensate its veterans.

of *England* (1763–83) celebrated the overthrow of what she regarded as Stuart tyranny in the civil war, and the public spirit of the parliamentary leaders – “the government of the country was in the hands of illustrious patriots, and wise legislators; the glory, the welfare, the true interest of the empire was their only care.”<sup>41</sup> Some readers such as Cowper enthusiastically shared her view.<sup>42</sup> But she also drew fire from many conservative male critics both for her Whiggish and allegedly republican sympathies and (implicitly) for her trespassing on the “male” territory of history writing. Johnson’s proposal that she invite her footman to join her at dinner, perhaps the best known of the jokes at her expense, ridicules her “levelling” principles, but other contemporary reactions suggest hostility toward her as a female political writer.<sup>43</sup> When she married William Graham in 1779, she was greeted with *The Female Patriot*, that imagines her writing to Dr. Thomas Wilson, her former benefactor:

How oft, ye sacred hearths, when patriot blaze  
 Illum’d our souls, and into raptures rais’d,  
 Instinct with bold enthusiastick rage  
 We hung with transport o’er th’Historick page!  
 And trac’d those heroes, whose avenging blow  
 Through tyrants breasts bade liberty to flow;  
 Then damn’d to infamy those venal things,  
 Which earth-born flattery created Kings.

Her “patriot tongue” later sings the glories of the Whig hero, the Duke of Marlborough, but the appearance of a new “hero,” her young husband to be, sends all ideas of political liberty out of the head of “our Republican Heroine”:

When the bold hero to my ravish’d view  
 His Godlike shape display’d so wondrous true;  
 Stern Patriotism ceas’d my Soul to move,  
 And all the Heroine languish’d into love.<sup>44</sup>

Macaulay’s enthusiastic patriotism is ridiculed as a kind of displaced eroticism, and the parodist dismisses her to woman’s proper fate as

<sup>41</sup> *The History of England . . .*, 3rd. edn., 8 vols. (London, 1763–83), v (1772), 364.

<sup>42</sup> See his 1782 letters in *Letters and Prose Writings*, ed. James King and Charles Ryskamp (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), II, 13, 17, 31.

<sup>43</sup> Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, I, 448.

<sup>44</sup> *The Female Patriot* (London, 1779), 7–8, 12, 28. At the time of the marriage Graham was twenty-one, Macaulay a forty-seven-year-old widow. For an account of Macaulay’s second marriage, see Bridget Hill, *Republican Virago: The Life and Times of Catharine Macaulay, Historian* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 105–29.